

QUERIES FROM HEARINGS AND COUNCIL'S RESPONSES
BERKHAMSTED RESIDENTS ACTION GROUP (BRAG) COMMENTS
14th November 2012

QUESTION 1B: Census 2011

(b) Responding purely to the Inspectors question relating to the 2011 Census, the implication of the Census is clear - if trends between 2001 and 2011 continue through to 2031, the 11,320 dwelling target of the Core Strategy contains a considerable buffer above actual need for the borough.

BRAG is sure that developers will point out (and probably grossly inflate the importance of) the fact that in its answer, DBC have not applied the percentage increase but simply multiplied out the actual population number increase through to 2031, so their assumed population growth of 14,000 over the next 20 years is inadequate.

But the numbers are simple.

Applying the past percentage population increase leads to a total population projection of 159,884 for 2031 and a household population of 157,884 assuming that the number of persons living in communal establishments continues to remain stable as it has over the past ten years.

As BRAG pointed out during the examination process and DBC allude to in its answer to the Inspectors question, the average number of persons per household is the critical figure when calculating dwelling requirements. This number has decreased from 2001 to 2011, but importantly not by nearly the amount previously projected and if the average household size continues to drop at the same rate it will be 2.294 in 2031.

An average household size of 2.294 leads to a household projection of 68,824. The number of households in 2006 was 58,783. Hence, using projections based on the 2011 Census the required number of dwellings for the Core Strategy period 2006-2031 is just 10,041.

So, based purely on the 2011 Census and growth from 2001, the clear implication is that the Core Strategy target of 11,320 dwellings has a built in buffer of 12.7% above the actual projected need.

BRAG would argue that 12.7% is far too large a buffer and lends further support to BRAG's previous submissions to the Inspector regarding the true housing need in the region in general and specifically Berkhamsted.

Issue 3: Accessibility

BRAG believes that the Inspector asked the Council to look into BRAG's concerns over the safety of the A41 slip roads, specifically those serving Berkhamsted. However, there is no mention of this in DBC's answers.

BRAG raised the issue both within its original submission and at the hearing session. Since then BRAG has had informal talks with Taxi drivers who support the view that the slip roads are inadequate and will become increasingly unsafe with increased traffic.

It is BRAG's assertion that by ignoring this point DBC is at best ignoring a substantial infrastructure cost that will have to be incurred further down the line – at worst lives will be lost. If developments go ahead without improvements then eventually the cost will fall on the community in one way or another.

In the absence of any answers from the council, BRAG would ask the Inspector to assess the slip roads personally, though had he tried to on the morning of 12th November he would have found the Chesham/Berkhamsted slip closed due to an accident.

Question 5B: Berkhamsted Business Parking Survey

BRAG introduced the BBPS to this process, although BRAG had nothing to do with the surveys compilation.

It is disappointing that DBC dismiss the survey so lightly as it is an important reflection of the feeling in the town and highlights problems that already exist that would simply be exacerbated by further housing developments.

For the record 62 businesses took part in the survey affecting over 300 employees. One company, ABC Ltd, who employs 100 people, went on to submit a lengthy letter on this topic to the local paper. They, along with several other businesses employing specialist staff from a wider geographic area, are threatening to relocate away from the town if parking becomes more congested.

By ignoring what was a significant survey, DBC are missing a little piece of the jigsaw. For every little piece of the jigsaw that is missing, such as this and the A41 issue, the overall picture becomes distorted.

BRAG simply wants DBC to take a holistic view to the Core Strategy, as BRAG is sure is the intention of the Inspector.

Question 11A: Trip Rates

It would seem to BRAG that peak trip rates have been woefully underestimated for SS1. BRAG finds it difficult to believe that the standard calculation is just "0.4 to 0.8 trips per dwelling in peak hour".

Experience tells that it is greater than the upper limit of 0.8, but if we accept that to be true then surely the upper limit has to be used for SS1, being a ridge top location with no viable public transport options in a town that has a high basic dependency on the car.

Question 11B: CPRE Sites

It is good that many of those sites listed will be used for housing and it serves as evidence to those who would say otherwise that brownfield sites are and do become available.

However, it is disappointing that developers with sites that have a real chance of true sustainable development (on the flat and near the town centre with good public transport access) are not by default forced to provide dwellings as part of the development. The Royal Mail site being a prime of example of this.